ORBITAL OBSERVER

2008 Eastercon News Zine

ISSUE 2 FEBRUARY 2007

CONTEMPLATION CON COMMITTEE COUNT CONSIDERABLE CHARMS OF CHESTER CITY CENTRE

News Zine Editor grateful for Contemplation's facilitation of alliteration

Over the weekend of January 20-21st the 2007 Eastercon committee and staff gave the Crowne Plaza hotel a good going over. Functions rooms inspected, bar sampled, breakfast eaten, and decided, "Hey,lets run the con right here!". Fortunately, they already were.

Location, Location

The hotel is right in the heart of Chester, and while the city is not quite as *Hollyoaks* had led me to expect, it is a fun place to visit. Throw a stick from the hotel and you will likely hit an interesting shop, restaurant or café. A trip on Saturday evening to a nearby Oriental restaurant had us eating more excellent Chinese food than I'd have thought possible without adding stomach extensions, and for a total price that I usually associate with *hors d'œuvre*. The hotel itself has stylish décor in both the bedrooms and function space, and proved very comfortable during the visit. See the Contemplation web site **http://contemplation.conventions.org.uk** and the hotels own site **http://www.ichotelsgroup.com/h/d/cp/925/en/hd/chets.**

Local Chester officials and Contemplation committee member greet each other

Things will be a bit more compact than for recent Eastercons, the hotel is good, but not that big, so some items will have to be modified or dropped due to space. Lack of space for dedicated workshop room for Chaos Costume means no Masquerade, and Beyond Cyberdrome won't be running either. However, a pretty full programme is being planned. A programming weekend took place on Jan 27-28th, and a multi-stream programme is coming together.

Join now!

You can join Contemplation on-line (see the **Future Events** listing). More details are in their newsletter already posted out to all current members, and available on their web site. A progress report will be available soon.

ORBITAL'S GUESTS

Neil Gaiman was interviewed on-line on The Well on February 7th, as part of the launch of *Fragile Things*, his new short story collection. As well as the book, there is also an audiobook version which he reads himself, and if you have ever heard Neil read one of his stories at a con, you'll know how good he is. As well as *Fragile Things*, there is discussion of his comics work, the forthcoming Stardust movie and more. See **http://www.well.com/conf/inkwell.vue/topics/292/Neil-Gaiman-Fragile-Things-page01.html** Neil's *Absolute Sandman* was included in Time's top ten graphic novels of 2006. On his journal he comments, "*Still, it was nice for me to see Absolute Sandman on there, mostly because when I wrote it, in 1987-1989, it would have been unthinkable for Time Magazine, or any real-world magazine, to have devoted any space at all to graphic novels or comics on a Best of the Year list.*"

China Miéville's new illustrated book for younger readers *Un Lun Dun* is due out in early April. You can see him on-line describing the book at **http://www.meettheauthor.co.uk/bookbites/1371.html** (RealPlayer video).

Charles Stross is the only British author nominated for the 2007 Prometheus Award, which is awarded by the Libertarian Futurist Society for best libertarian novel of the year. His novel *The Clan Corporate* is up for the award along with novels by Orson Scott Card, David D.

Cont. overleaf

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This newsletter will run every 2 or 3 months until the 2008 Eastercon, with a mix of Orbital news, SF news, fandom news and articles. Available at fan meets, conventions, and the Orbital web site, **http://www.orbital2008.org/**

If you would like some for a fan group you are involved with, let us know (contact address and email is at bottom of pg.2), or, if you can print some out and distribute them yourself then that would be great. If you do, let us know, we like to know where they are getting to.

Eddie Cochrane

OTHER NEWS

The Arthur C Clarke Award shortlist was announced (see **http://www.clarkeaward.com/news.html**) on 20th January in Soho, London. The six nominated books are: *End of the World Blues* by Jon Courtenay Grimwood, *Nova Swing* by M. John Harrison, *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart* by Lydia Millet, *Hav* by Jan Morris, *Gradisil* by Adam Roberts and *Streaking* by Brian Stableford. The winner of the £2007 prize will be announced on Wednesday 2nd May, at the opening night of the ***Sci-Fi-London Film Festival***. Who says literary and media SF can't play nice?

BSFA Awards be presented this Easter at ***Contemplation***, in a ceremony on Saturday 7th April. The Novel, Short Fiction and Artwork categories will be voted for by members of the BSFA and Contemplation. See the BSFA web site **http://www.bsfa.co.uk/index.cfm/section.nom2006** for nominees.

Pádraig Ó Méalóid of Slovo Books is selling the extensive book collection of Dave Stewart, the much missed Irish fan, who passed away last year. The first sale will be at ***P-Con 4***, (see pg. 2 for con details). Proceeds will be going towards Oesophogeal Cancer research.

Orbital will be participating in the informal Eastercon passalong funds mechanism. We will pass on left-over funds (after producing a post-con souvenir book and making a charitable donation) to a future Eastercon or Eastercons.

Anniversarial

By Mark Plummer

Editors are wonderful people, especially when they prevent you from saying something silly or just plain unfortunate. If, hypothetically, you've just delivered a column of fan and sf news which references next year's Eastercon and between delivery and publication of the column said Eastercon is regrettably forced to cancel, for instance. Hypothetically.

The cancellation of Convoy was announced in the first issue of the *Orbital Observer* and in its wake fandom entered a collective state of What Do We Do Now? I have some sympathy with the idea that we shouldn't rush to put on an Eastercon just because it's what we always do, but equally I'm conscious of the driving force of historical continuity. The first 'Eastercon'—for all that it was at Whitsun—was in 1948. Setting aside 1951, and that's only skipped for obscure numerical reasons involving an unfortunate oversight in 1971, there's been one every year since. And it seems a shame to stop now, especially in the year that marks the seventieth anniversary of the first British science fiction convention (**http://www.dcs.gla.ac.uk/SF-Archives/Then/then_1-1.html**), and arguably the first in the world.

The actual anniversary rather slipped by me (3 January, the day before the mere sixty-one years old 'First Thursday' London pub meeting: http://news.ansible.co.uk/london.html) but it seems something worth commemorating this year generally. I know Steve Green has plans to do something to mark the occasion at Novacon (http://www.novacon37.org.uk/), but it's a milestone which I think can stand several celebrations; so perhaps it's just as well that we have an alternative Eastercon for 2007 in the form of Contemplation (**http://contemplation.conventions.org.uk/**). Oh, and in case you don't know, that 'arguably' bit in the previous paragraph is because there's a prior claim for first convention in the form of a fan gathering that took place in Philadelphia in 1936. The Leeds event certainly looked more like a convention as we understand it, but in 1936 nobody knew what a science fiction convention looked like anyway. If you see Pat McMurray, why not ask him to buy you a drink and explain it all in Great Detail.

The fact that we now have an Eastercon again means that there's somewhere to present the BSFA awards. These are the longest-running British science fiction awards, dating back to 1970 (for 1969 work) and thus being almost as old as the Nebulas. The shortlists for this year are on the BSFA website (**http://www.bsfa.co.uk/index.cfm/section.shortlist2006**) and voting is open to both BSFA and Eastercon members. Some of the short fiction and all of the artwork is available on line, so it's relatively easy to participate in at least some of the categories.

This year the BSFA has also published a list of recommended non-fiction works, which includes a collection of essays (edited by Paul Kincaid, with Andrew M Butler) on the winners of the Arthur C Clarke Award (**http://www.amazon.co.uk/Arthur-C-Clarke-Award-Anthology/dp/095524160X/**). The Clarke Award doesn't have quite the longevity of the BSFA Award—it dates back to 1987 (for 1986 work)—and you don't get to vote on it unless you happen to be one of the five people who are judging this year, but the books it has short-listed over the last two decades (**http://www.locusmag.com/SFAwards/Db/Clarke.html**) are some of the best in the genre.

Of course, sometimes that historical continuity thing fails us. TAFF, which has been shuffling well-known fans back and forth across the Atlantic since 1954 (**http://taff.org.uk/**), was planning to bring a delegate from North America to Europe for Eastercon 2007, but the trip was postponed because of the then uncertainty about exactly what would be happening at Easter. The good news, from an Orbital standpoint, is that the race will now bring a delegate to the 2008 Eastercon. And you still have a chance to vote in the JETS ballot to send a European fan to the Worldcon in Japan in August (**http://astralpole.org/display.php?id=12**), and maybe, just maybe, in a GUFF race to send a European delegate to the New Zealand and Australian national conventions (**http://taff.org.uk/guff.html**) in June. Keep an eye on the usual news sources (e.g. **http://news.ansible.co.uk/Ansible.html**) for notice of delegates and voting deadlines. JETS ballots will almost certainly be available at this year's Eastercon.

And here's another historical thing: Peter Weston, or rather Peter Weston's fanzine *Prolapse*, making a welcome return after a 23-year hiatus between its second and third issue. #4, following #3 by a mere one month, has lots of material about the 1959 Eastercon, and indeed who that 'Doc' Weir fellow was and why we have an award named after him (**http://www.efanzines.com/DocWeir/index.htm**). Pete's fanzine is available from Bill Burns's efanzines website (**http://www.efanzines.com/Prolapse/index.htm**) where you can find all sorts of fascinating things extending far beyond the implied remit of the name. And for real historical continuity there's the beautiful twelfth issue of *Science-Fiction Five-Yearly*, a fanzine published with the frequency that its name implies under the overall editorship of Lee Hoffman, with Randy Byers and Geri Sullivan as guest editor/publishers this time around (**http://efanzines.com/SFFY/index.htm**). Lee died only a couple of weeks ago, so this will be the final issue.

And without wishing to end on a downbeat note, we should of course acknowledge some of the well-known figures from the British sf community, fan and professional, who won't be with us this Easter. These include Janet Figg, Gytha North, David Gemmell, Mike Damesick, Philip Strick and Ron Bennett. And although he wasn't British we should also mention Irish fan stalwart David Stewart.

Yet the Eastercon rolls on: the seventieth anniversary of British conventions this year; the sixtieth anniversary of the first 'Eastercon' and also the fiftieth anniversary of the BSFA at Orbital in 2008; and the sixtieth Eastercon—see, that slight cock-up in 1971 actually helps spread the anniversaries around—comes around in 2009. Collect the set.

Cont. from previous page

Friedman, Robert A. Heinlein and Spider Robinson, Elizabeth Moon, John Scalzi, John Varley, Vernor Vinge. The winner gets a one ounce gold coin, but sadly no gun to fight off jealous socialists.

The British edition of Charlie's *Glasshouse* should be arriving in bookshops soon, publication date is March 1st. *Glasshouse* is set in the same universe as his 2005 novel *Accelerando*, though it's not a sequel.

SFRevu Review has an interview with Charlie discussing the latest of the "Laundry" stories *The Jennifer Morgue*, where he is asked, "*how long have you had these dreams that you were the 21st century's Ian Fleming?*" See **http://sfrevu.com/php/Review-id.php?id=5071**

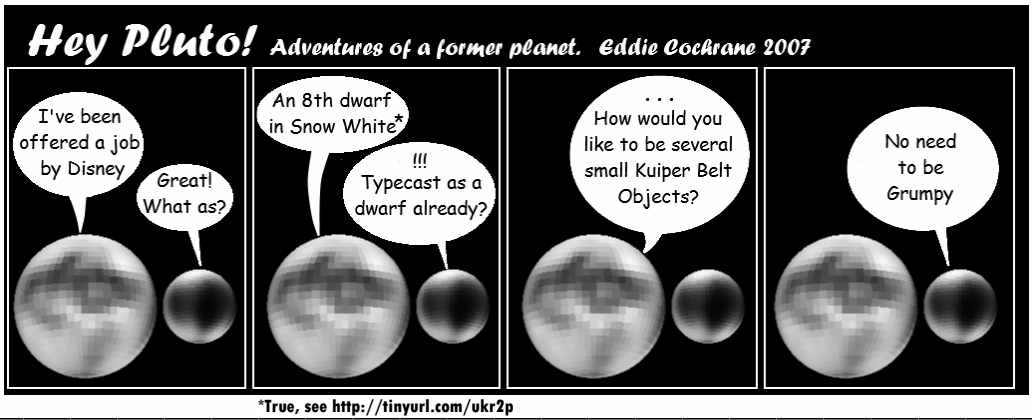
Future Events

P-Con 4, Wynn's Hotel, Abbey Street, Dublin 10-11 March, 2007. **http://www.slovobooks.com/pcon4/**

Contemplation, 6-9th April 2007, Crowne Plaza Hotel, Chester. 2007 Eastercon, see **http://contemplation.conventions.org.uk**

Sci-Fi-London Film Festival, 2-6 May 2007, see **http://www.sci-fi-london.com/**

Confounding Tales, 25-27 May 2007, Normandy Hotel, Glasgow. **http://www.empirewideweb.com**



*True, see http://tinyurl.com/ukr2p